

Paying attention to communication “survival signals” helps keep us safe

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Business communications has never been more complicated - Cell phones, video conferencing, e-mails, web content, correspondence, reports and presentations cause even the greatest writer or orator to stir with apprehension that their message is clearly understood. Each month this column will explore the many different ways each of us can learn to communicate more plainly.)

I have been reading a great book this summer called, *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us From Violence*, by Gavin DeBecker. I picked up this book up after it was recommended at a writer's conference. The book says that humans and animals have the gift of intuition or “gut feelings.” These feelings often protect us from danger and violence. In humans, however, the act of listening to our intuition or gut feelings is often overridden by our logical minds and then discounted, resulting in dire consequences for some people.

In this month's communication column, I wanted to briefly share some subtle communication patterns that are explained in the book that can indicate danger. This is an area of communication that is rarely discussed – an area of communication that may keep you safe at home, in public or even at work.

The Gift of Fear says that we should all pay attention to our intuition. If your intuition has been neglected and ignored for many years, begin by paying attention to the following:

- Nagging feelings
- Persistent thoughts
- Humor
- Wonder
- Anxiety
- Curiosity
- Hunches
- Gut Feelings
- Doubt
- Hesitation
- Suspicion
- Apprehension
- Fear

If you are experiencing these types of internal feelings, your intuition is gently telling you to pay attention to something. There are other external signs and behaviors that may

point to danger or dangerous individuals that are outlined in the book. When interacting with others, *The Gift of Fear* says to pay attention to the following behaviors:

Forced Teaming – An example of this type of behavior is if you are walking down the street to go to lunch and a stranger comes up beside you and says, “Hi...so where are we going for lunch today?” Or, maybe your car battery is dead in the parking lot and it’s late at night. A stranger comes up to you and says, “So, looks like we are in a bit of trouble here. I’ll give you a jump. I’m sure you’d do the same if I was in your shoes.”

Charm and Niceness – Pay attention to people that are charming versus people that are trying to charm you. Trying to charm someone is usually done with motive. Some criminals intentionally try to charm their victims by being overly nice or overly helpful to build rapport and gain trust. The stereotypical example of this is when a stranger offers candy to a child on a playground.

Too Many Details – Deceptive people often offer too many unsolicited details because they don’t want their victim to doubt them. For instance, the stranger on the street at lunch might say, “I am downtown today because my sister has a job interview and am waiting on her. I had to bring her in town today because her ex-husband borrowed her car since his car was totaled last week. So, I am just being a nice guy and helping her out.”

Typecasting – Typecasting happens when one person labels another person’s behavior in a negative way, which manipulates the victim into proving the stereotype wrong. For instance, the stranger on the street during lunch time might say, “Well, I guess we could have lunch...unless you are one of those women who would never have lunch with a guy like me.” People fall into this trap because they want to be perceived as nice and don’t want others to think badly of them.

Loan Sharking – This happens when someone offers to help another person without being asked and then expects something in return. If someone is carrying shopping bags to the car, a stranger might come up and say “Let me help you with those bags,” not wait for the answer, and then grab the bags, without giving the victim a choice in the matter. After the bags are in the car, the perpetrator might say something like, “Well, since I helped you with all those bags, you could at least have coffee with me.”

The Unsolicited Promise – An example of an unsolicited promise is if the stranger that carries your groceries says, “I’ll just help you to your car and then I’ll leave, I promise.” Stating “I promise” with no valid reason almost always indicates some sort of questionable motive.

Discounting the Word “No” – If you tell a person “no” several times and they continue to persist and you ultimately give in, you are essentially telling that person they are in charge. Be direct and firm when saying “no.” The person that weakly tells someone, “No, I don’t need any help changing my tire. Thank you for your offer to help though...that is really nice,” is more likely to be a victim than someone that directly looks

the other person in the eye, holds out their hand in the stop position and says firmly, "NO, I do not want your help.

For more helpful info on this topic, visit your local library or bookstore to check out *The Gift of Fear*. It provides helpful information about dangerous communication patterns that can be used to protect men, women and children.